American Christians and Islam

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Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism

Thomas S. Kidd

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To Jonathan and Joshua

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Preface

Since the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001, many pundits have asserted that the world is witnessing a global conflict between Islam and Christianity. A number of conservative American Christian leaders, following this trend, have generated news and controversy by casting severe aspersions on Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Some have gone so far as to suggest that Islam had demonic origins, eliciting public indignation from both religious and secular critics. There was a time in America, however, when such ideas about Islam would not have generated any outrage, for they reflected commonly held interpretations. The great eighteenth-century American theologian Jonathan Edwards, for instance, expressed a standard view when he identified Islam, along with Roman Catholicism, as one of the "two great kingdoms which the devil. . . erected in opposition to the kingdom of Christ." Muhammad, "being a crafty man," promised his ignorant followers "a sensual paradise" that they would enter through martyrdom in *jihad*, Edwards explained. The Prophet established his religion by violence, and fulfilled a prophecy of Revelation 9 that spoke of swarms of locusts emerging from a smoky abyss. Edwards anticipated that Christ would destroy Islam, along with all the other forces of the devil, at the battle of Armageddon.[1]

From Edwards's example, and many others in this book, we can see that much of the recent American Christian hostility toward Islam derives from a long historical tradition. Americans' interest in Islam has, of course, intensified since 2001, but we should not imagine that their interpretations of Islam are substantially new. Americans, and conservative American Christians in particular, have returned repeatedly over the centuries to several key themes regarding Islam. This book will illustrate how American Christians have dreamed of seeing Muslims convert to Christianity, and have celebrated anecdotal cases of Muslims becoming Christians. Evangelical Christians have similarly desired to send missionaries among Muslims to preach the gospel to them, and eagerly consumed stories of the missionaries' successes. Finally, Christians like Edwards have often included Muslims in their scenarios of the last days, and blended geopolitical news and opinion with

eschatological speculation (views about what would happen before the second coming of Christ).

Why have these themes persistently appeared in American Christian writing about Islam? Traditional Christians' exclusive system of faith has held that people could only find forgiveness from God in one manner: through Jesus and his atoning death on the cross. Therefore, all other world religions present challenges to the Christian faith. Devotees of other religions seemingly fail to answer correctly the most important question in life: What must one to do to be saved? To Christians, Islam poses a unique threat out of all the world's religions. As the only other monotheistic faith that was also aggressively evangelistic, Christians have long seen Islam as one of their major competitors—sometimes their primary competitor—for souls on the global stage. If history was moving inexorably toward Christ's ultimate triumph, then Muslims would either have to be converted or defeated in the last days. Islam appears to many conservative Christians as a worrisome but tantalizing religious and cultural opponent. Accounts of Muslim converts, missionary triumphs, and last days victories have often served to comfort Christians regarding the outcome of the perceived contest between the two faiths, even if the facts on the ground did not always merit optimism.

This book falls within a literature on Western views of Islam that had become very well developed even before 2001. Edward Said's classic but flawed 1978 book *Orientalism* has shaped much of the discussion about Western views of the Orient. Said argued that Western study of the East, and particularly the Middle East, has always served political purposes, and that "Orientalism" represented a Western tool "for dominating. . .and having authority over the Orient." Moreover, Said insisted that Western knowledge of the Orient was "discursive," in the sense that its rhetoric masked deeper cultural agendas and ultimately revealed more about the West than the East. Some readers will want to know where I stand on the sometimes fierce debate about Said and Orientalism. Although his argument seems to have been overstated and compromised by factual errors, I am relatively sympathetic to Said's Orientalist thesis regarding much of the West's knowledge of Islam and the Middle East. Applying the implications of the Orientalist thesis to American Christians' beliefs about Islam, readers should note (strange as it may sound) that I do not consider this book to be about Islam itself. It is about American Christians and the views they produced about Islam, which normally catered to constituencies within American Christian communities. I believe that American Christians' views about Islam usually divulge more about American Christians than about any actual Muslims.[2]

Some readers may also wish that I would assess the fairness or accuracy

of American Christians' views about Islam, but I fear that such a task is largely beyond my competence. My training is in American religious history, not the global history of Islam. Because many of the views about Islam described here are outrageously negative, and put their exponents in a very poor light, some may wonder whether this book is actually intended to vilify Christian writers and paint an overly rosy picture of Muslims. This is not my intention. My own view is that with more than a billion Muslims living in the world, it is very difficult to say what "Muslims" in general are like. I am painfully aware of the horrific violence committed by Muslim extremists in the name of Islam. But when it comes to the question of what Islam is, or what it causes its followers to do, the answer is best left up to experts' studies of particular groups. It matters whether we are talking about Hui Muslims in China, Hausa Muslims in Niger, Sufi mystics in Pakistan, Taliban fighters in Afghanistan, or Iranian immigrants in America. Obviously, this list of individual Muslim groups could go on and on across the globe. Muslims traditionally embrace certain core doctrines about Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, and the Qur'an, but the faith's implications in the lives of believers surely are not unidirectional. The same can be said for Christianity.

Readers will also note that, despite the expansive title of this book, its subject is more limited than "American Christians" generally, especially as it moves into the twentieth century. The main focus here is conservative American Protestantism, or what we now commonly call evangelicalism. I do note some liberal Protestant, as well as Catholic, views, but mostly for comparative purposes. My primary justification for this selectivity, beyond maintaining a reasonable length, lies within the topics and sources I am considering: memoirs of missionary work, popular eschatology, and conversion narratives. Most of these literary genres have been dominated by conservative Protestants in America. Since the 1920s, American evangelicalism has developed into a more distinct subculture within American Christianity, but one that has enjoyed ever-increasing influence in politics, publishing, and pop culture. I trust that readers will understand that the narrative I have presented here is thematic rather than comprehensive. Other authors might well tell the story in a very different way.

Readers not familiar with my work may also find it helpful to know that I am a practicing Christian, which surely accounts for part of my concern with what American Christians have thought and written about Islam. Too much American Christian writing on Islam has cultivated sensationalized ideas about Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, at the expense of charitable understanding. American Christians—and Christians elsewhere—have of-

ten essentialized and stereotyped Muslims out of pain, anger, and fear. They have not just reacted this way since 2001, but since America's colonial era. Some readers might protest that the sin of stereotyping does not compare to the atrocities committed by some Muslims in the name of their religion. I would only remind such readers that this book is about Christians, rather than Muslims. Verbal and literary violence is violence nonetheless, and often sets the stage for the physical violence of war and domestic persecution. Admitting one's own failings, in any case, does not necessarily imply a "moral equivalence" with others' failings.

Most of my own previous writing has been on eighteenth-century Anglo-America, and as I researched that era I kept noticing (with eyes newly sensitized by the attacks of September 2001) references to Islam and its Prophet appearing in colonial and Revolutionary-era literature. Frankly, I was surprised to find it there. The more I investigated, the more I realized that American, British, and other Western Christians have produced long-standing conventions of thought about Islam, much of which stands in continuity with contemporary themes. The first chapter, then, considers the uses early Anglo-Americans made of Islam. Often, they employed Islam in intra-Protestant theological debates, and associated opponents' religious views with Muhammad's. Early Americans also had to face the threat of the Barbary pirates, who routinely captured European Christians and held them for ransom in North Africa. The threat of Barbary piracy, and the theological challenge of Islam, helped generate popular stories of Muslim conversions to Protestant Christianity, and also led Christian theologians to consider Islam's place in the last days.

The American fear of, and theological engagement with, Islam grew more prominent in the early republic, a trend that the second chapter of this book investigates. Barbary piracy had waned in the middle of the eighteenth century, but after American independence pirates attacked American ships with the (correct) assumption that the fledgling nation would struggle to defend its seafaring interests. Barbary captivity narratives reached new heights of popularity, and eschatological writing concerning Islam became even more common. Following earlier patterns, the eschatology of the early republic followed historicist models, which interpreted prophetic passages like Revelation 9 as referring to the rise of Islam. Historicist interpretation waned following the overzealous forecasts of William Miller and his followers, who predicted that Jesus would return in 1843. A whole new school of prophetic interpretation, dispensationalism, surged in popularity in the late nineteenth century. Dispensationalists offered a less certain accounting for Islam in prophecy than historicists had. Dispensationalists saw most of the

prophecies in Daniel, Revelation, and other Biblical texts as yet to be fulfilled, so that Jonathan Edwards's sort of reading of Revelation 9's smoke locusts became passé.

The perception of a growing clash between Islam and Christianity aided the effort to send American missionaries to Muslim lands, which is the subject of the third chapter. Missions to Muslims proceeded in the broader context of the first large-scale British and American missionary movement, which began in the early nineteenth century. Although it proved very difficult legally and practically to evangelize Muslims overseas, Americans soon produced hosts of missionary tracts and memoirs related to Muslims. Muslim conversion narratives became more popular and abundant, too, along with "Bible lands" travel narratives describing the life and religion of Middle Easterners. This literature conveyed an impression that Muslims were spiritually hungry and ready to convert en masse, even though the actual numbers of converts were very small.

Some American Christians became frustrated about the lack of actual missionary success among Muslims, and set out in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to accomplish the "evangelization of the Muslim world in this generation." This ideal served as a subsidiary goal of the missionary movement's desire to reach the whole world for Christ. The effort to organize Muslim missions, and the growing dispensational focus on the Jewish homeland, are the main topics of chapter 4. The key leader in coordinating American missions to Muslims in this period was the prominent missionary and Orientalist Samuel Zwemer. While missions advocates like Zwemer anticipated a gradual conversion of the world's population before the return of Christ, the dispensationalist camp saw in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the new impetus to create a Jewish nation, signs that the end might occur more suddenly. While dispensationalists did not initially give a prominent place to political Islam, the controversy over Israel in the mid-twentieth century did begin to establish Arab Muslims as Israel's great eschatological enemies, along with the Soviet Russians.

Chapter 5 will show that in the 1920s and '30s, the American missionary consensus fell apart over issues related to the fundamentalist-modernist crisis in the American churches, which had significant implications for missions to Muslims. Because of the fallout from the theological wars of the 1920s, conservative missionaries slowly came to dominate most mission fields. New non-denominational evangelical missionary agencies like the Sudan Interior Mission focused primarily on proselytism and conversion, not on social aid or education. As evangelicals began to control most mid-twentieth-century missionary efforts among Muslims and other non-

Christians, other conservatives developed a more elaborate eschatology focused on the nation of Israel and her enemies. Increasingly, conservative American Protestants pointed to the inevitable eschatological hostility between "Isaac and Ishmael," or Jews and Arabs, and argued that the conflict in the Middle East reflected ancient spiritual animosity more than contemporary political problems. In time, these two conservative focal points—dispensationalism and missions to Muslims—would begin to clash because of the dispensationalists' innate sympathy toward Israel.

While much of American Christians' thinking about Islam has focused on non-American Muslims, in the post–World War II era Christians also had to contend with a domestic Muslim presence, which is the subject of chapter 6. This new Islamic factor has come in two primary forms: the American-born Nation of Islam, and after 1965, Muslim immigrants and students coming to America from overseas. Some conservative American Christians have considered these new Muslims as frightening domestic threats, while others have called for sympathy and kindness toward American Muslims, even as they have maintained the imperative to evangelize them.

Chapter 7 shows that after the collapse of the older American missionary system, evangelicals began to show interest similar to Zwemer's in organizing evangelistic efforts toward Muslims (and other non-Christians) globally, with the goal of fulfilling Christ's command to make disciples in all nations before he returned. Again, the heightened expectations for missionary breakthroughs among Muslims sometimes operated in tension with the burgeoning eschatological fascination with Jews and Muslims in the Middle East. Each new crisis in the Middle East, from the Six-Day War of 1967 to the Persian Gulf War of 1991, gave prophecy writers new opportunities to reflect on the fate of Israel and her Muslim neighbors. Active missionaries realized, however, that one could not bring dispensational views of Israel into the mission field with Muslims, where those ideas would become a barrier to effective witnessing.

The effect of the terrorist attacks of September 2001 on American Christian thought about Islam, the subject of chapter 8, is not yet entirely clear, but it seems that the attacks primarily re-energized familiar themes of Muslim conversions and Islam's place in the end times. These hopes gave some comfort that the dangers coming from jihadist Islam would be defeated. Among the most revealing developments since 2001 has been a new type of dispensationalist literature that places Islam at the center of end-times scenarios, with a Muslim Antichrist leading attacks against Israel in the last days. This kind of eschatology demonstrates the way in which some conser-

vative Christian theology shapes itself according to the latest crises in the news.

In writing these chapters, I have discovered three primary changes and tensions over time that surprised me and should interest readers. First, there has historically been a major difference between image and reality in Americans' view of missionary work among Muslims. Cheery eschatological optimism about the inevitable conversion of the Muslim world to Christianity, and the assumptions that Muslims were spiritually empty and waiting for an introduction to Jesus, masked the fact that Western missions to Muslims have, at least until recent decades, been a near-total failure. Some missions advocates like Samuel Zwemer addressed this disappointment head-on, but others have often pointed to scanty anecdotal evidence of Muslim converts as a substitute for realistic assessment of Muslims' hardy resistance to the Christian gospel.

A second change that I did not fully grasp upon entering this study was the dramatic transition among conservatives from historicist to dispensational eschatology, and the great difference this alteration held for views of Islam's role in the last days. Before the mid-nineteenth century, Anglo-American conservative theologians always identified a clear place for the rise of Islam in Bible prophecy. With the rise of dispensationalism and its futurist emphasis, Islam lost much of its natural place in dominant Anglo-American prophetic thought. That central position could only be reasserted when news about the nation of Israel seemed to make Arab Muslims the Jews' great eschatological opponent. Only since 2001 has political Islam assumed a role as the leading villain in some Americans' scenarios of the last days.

Finally, it has become evident to me that two of the salient themes in conservative American Christians' writing about Islam in the twentieth century—dispensationalism and missions—have often explicitly clashed. In light of the Arab-Israeli crisis, many American prophecy writers have claimed that Christians were required to support Israel because God would always defend Israel and bless the nations that supported her. Many missionaries among Muslims found such views embarrassing, and feared they would obstruct evangelism. Although many dispensationalists participated in missions, there seems to have been an inverse relationship between direct involvement with missions to Muslims and zeal for the political eschatology of the dispensationalists. This split between conservative Protestants represents one of the most fascinating findings of this book.

The key themes of American Christian thought about Islam serve reassuring purposes for their articulators. Eschatological writing on Islam seems

to have surged at times of Christian fear or anger related to Muslims, while the interest in missionary activity and Muslim converts suggested confidence in Christianity's final triumph over global competitors. The blending of political conviction and Christian theology, similarly, serves to affirm the rectitude of one's temporal and eternal views. Traditional American Christians' views of Islam illustrate the grave difficulties of maintaining exclusive religious views in a pluralist global society. How can a person uphold the truth of his or her spiritual beliefs while not demonizing other religions' adherents? One might hope that the Christian obligations of charity and grace might offer some assistance in these matters, but unfortunately, American evangelicals' dealings with Islam seem often to have exacerbated, not alleviated, the problem of traditional religion in a pluralist world.

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American Christians and Islam

CHAPTER 1

Early American Christians and Islam

In the last public act before his death, Benjamin Franklin parodied a proslavery speech in Congress by comparing it to a fictitious proslavery address by a North African Muslim pirate named Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim. Like proslavery southerners, the Algerian argued that he could not accept the end of Christian slavery because it would hurt the interests of the Algerian state, unfairly deprive Muslim slave masters of property, and release dangerous slaves into a vulnerable society. Franklin's salvo against slavery was published in 1790 in major northern newspapers.[1] His polemical use of a Muslim character is one of the most famous from eighteenth-century America, but was not unique. Islamic references peppered the public documents of early America, demonstrating that many were not only aware of the religion, but also ready to use it as a rhetorical tool. A close look at the uses of Islam in Anglo-American writing before 1800 shows that Franklin's appropriation of a Muslim character represented a well-established tradition: citing the similarities between an opponent's views and the "beliefs" of Islam as a means to discredit one's adversaries. Over the course of the eighteenth century, Americans' uses of Islam became increasingly secularized. Early in the century, Islam was typically used for religious purposes in religious debates, while later commentators often implemented knowledge of despotic Islamic states to support political points. Although one should hesitate to describe early Americans as conversant with Islam, they certainly conversed about Islam regularly. In doing so, they established views of Muslims that would persist, in very different contexts, through our own day.

How did North Americans before 1790 become aware of Islam? Although there were perhaps thousands of Muslim African slaves working on colonial American plantations, most free white observers failed to realize their devotion, and their presence had little impact on the way elite Anglo-American colonists imagined Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Prominent Boston pastor Cotton Mather once noted that "we are afar off, in a Land, which never had (that I ever heard of) one Mahometan breathing in it."[2] In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Muslims interacted with Elizabethan and Jacobean Britons in business and seafaring contacts, and appeared as char-

acters in plays and books. After migrating to North America, however, direct contacts with Muslims became much less frequent for British colonists, especially for those with no ocean-going business. It appears that the two main sources from which early Americans derived their impressions of Islam were the enslavement of Europeans and North Americans in North Africa, and widely circulated books and sermons related to Islam.

Colonial North Americans, though living in a provincial society far distant from the physical residence of most African or Asian Muslims, nevertheless included them in their mental array of conflicting world religions. They were able to do this because of the ways printed treatises allowed colonists to believe they had legitimate "knowledge" of Islam. Anglo-American colonists used their knowledge of Islam to reinforce the superiority of their brand of Protestantism over its challengers, such as Deism or Catholicism, and to de-legitimize Islam and Muslims religiously, morally, and racially.

European Christians entertained both a lurid interest in, and a "paranoic repugnance" for, Islam since at least the Crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but that fascination took a new turn beginning in the sixteenth century as "Barbary" pirates began to seize Christian sailors and make them slaves.[3] The term "Barbary" itself suggests non-normative races, or those who refuse to cooperate with the dominant faith or commercial systems. Even the North African church leader Saint Augustine used the term "barbarian" to describe his fellow countrymen who would not accept Christianity. In the early modern period, Europeans also routinely used the term "Barbary" to refer to the states of North Africa that campaigned against Europe's seafaring tradesmen, including Anglo-American sailors.[4] Many escaped or redeemed Britons wrote about their experiences to satisfy a growing literature on captives' lives in Islamic cultures.

In 1675, the English captive William Okeley set a significant pattern for the Anglo-American Barbary captivity narrative with his *Eben-Ezer or a Small Monument of Great Mercy*. Okeley faced down his Muslim captors with insistences that the Prophet Muhammad had "patch'd up. . . Jewish, and Monkish Fopperies, which was now their Religion." He marveled at the hypocrisy of Ramadan, when by day the Algerians fasted with great solemnity, but by night gorged themselves on food, drink, and sex. He called this a "Hypocrisie so gross, that whether it be to be sampled any where in the World, unless, perhaps, by the Popish [Roman Catholic] Carnevals, I cannot tell." Okeley and his companions stole away from Algiers and were providentially delivered back to England, but not before witnessing many cruelties and tortures by their Muslim captors.[5]

North Americans too watched with horror as some of their sons were enslaved by "the Fierce Monsters of Africa," and "Mahometan Turks and Moors, and Devils," as Cotton Mather called them.[6] Though there were some North American captives taken earlier, the first case of Barbary captivity to generate significant public interest was that of Captain William Foster of Roxbury, Massachusetts, who was captured with his son in 1671 and held for three years. Increase Mather (Cotton's father) mentioned this case as evidence that prayer worked to deliver Christians from the hands of their enemies, and noted that when Foster was in captivity the church at Charlestown set aside a day of prayer and fasting to ask for his deliverance. The situation looked dire as the "infidel King" was not inclined to liberate them for money. God intervened, however, by causing the unexpected death of their captor, leading to Foster and his son's liberation. Mather noted that this was only one of many examples when prayer helped free "Captives amongst the heathen," such as the nearly contemporaneous deliverance of the pious heroine Mary Rowlandson from Native Americans. Direct colonial encounters with Native American peoples surely helped British colonists articulate stereotypes of supposedly inferior North African and Turkish Muslims, as well, despite the lack of English colonial success against Muslim powers.[7]

Several other Anglo-Americans were taken by the pirates during the 1670s, including Seth Southell, the appointed royal governor of Carolina, who was abducted as he traveled to North America in 1679, and later ransomed so he could assume the governorship. Joshua Gee was captured in 1680 during a transatlantic voyage from Boston. His captivity narrative, now extant only in incomplete fragments, seems to have generated much discussion in Boston, and helped confirm the cruelties of the Muslims. Gee recorded the viciousness of his master who once "swore he wo[u]ld the next daye boare o[u]te my eyes with his knife" and gave him "many evell treatments." Gee used the narrative to highlight the comforting power of Scripture, and he portrayed his Muslim captors as influenced by his prayers.[8]

Stories of Barbary captivity were so common that alms-seekers among the urban poor in colonial America occasionally used them to curry favor. Artisan Joseph Bean of Cambridge, Massachusetts, noted in 1742 that he met a beggar who claimed he had "been among the turks." When the sailor would not "own th[eir] Imposter for to be Christ[,] they burnt his arms" so he could no longer work. Bean suspected the man might have falsified the story, but he considered him an "object of pitty" and gave him some money. This brief encounter spoke to the popular resonance of the Barbary captivity narrative in America.[9]

The Barbary captives helped generate an interest in America in literature on the Muslim states of North Africa, reflected in former English captive Francis Brooks's *Barbarian Cruelty*. This text, which Cotton Mather used to describe the conditions of the captives, included a wide-ranging discussion of Islamic piracy and slavery in North Africa. Brooks addressed his narrative to King William and Queen Mary, with the purpose of letting them know "the deplorable and miserable Condition" of English subjects "under the barbarous Tyranny and Inhumanity of Mully Ishmael [Moulay Ismaïl] Emperor of Morocco." Brooks reported that the English "Christians were grievously hurried and punished by those Hellish Negroes" who regularly demanded that they "turn Moors," or Muslims. He filled his account with stories of the Emperor's cruelties, but perhaps none was more revealing than his account of an English virgin taken by the pirates. She was delivered up to Moulay Ismaïl, who pressured her to "turn Moor, and lie with him." The woman resisted, so the Emperor raped and impregnated her. Muslim leaders routinely appeared as sexual predators in the captivity narratives.[10]

In Brooks's account, the Emperor also constantly demanded that the Christian captives convert to Islam. In one case, a French and an English captive made a failed attempt to escape, and they were brought before the Emperor, who offered them their lives if they would convert. Exhibiting the typical anti-Catholic themes of British Protestant literature, the Frenchman (a Catholic) gave in to the pressure, but the Englishman would not, replying that "God's Power was greater than the Devil's." Enraged, the Emperor had his "Negroes" mutilate the English prisoner "till his Body was as full of Holes as possible." The English captives admired this man's fortitude and reminded one another that he had counted his faith more precious than life.[11]

Brooks attributed some of Moulay Ismaïl's brutality to his racial characteristics, noting that he was a mulatto, "begotten of a Negro Woman by a white Man." When Ismaïl became enraged, he became "as black as an Infernal Imp." The Emperor made a habit of killing at least a person or two among his Christian or native African slaves every day, a practice that Brooks explained by reference to his Islamic faith: "Mahomet their great Prophet possessing them with a Belief, that if he kills any one, he merits Heaven by so doing." Brooks considered Ismaïl selective in his obedience to Muhammad's teachings, as he did not abstain from wine, but if he found that any of his entourage had so indulged, he would kill them.[12] Brooks eventually escaped from captivity and made his way back to England. Captivity narratives like Brooks's helped frame the global confrontation between Islam and Christianity for Anglo-Americans. Though it does not

appear that many Anglo-Americans took seriously, or even knew of, the Islamic polemic against Christianity, many Britons did know that some English captives in North Africa had abandoned Christianity in favor of Islam. Many more Christians actually converted to Islam during the early modern period than vice versa.[13] Perhaps some apostates did this only for material gain, but surely many did so in part because they favored Islam as a religion. The prospect of any Englishmen turning Muslim was disconcerting enough to help make captivity narratives popular assurances of the ultimate superiority of Christianity over Islam.[14]

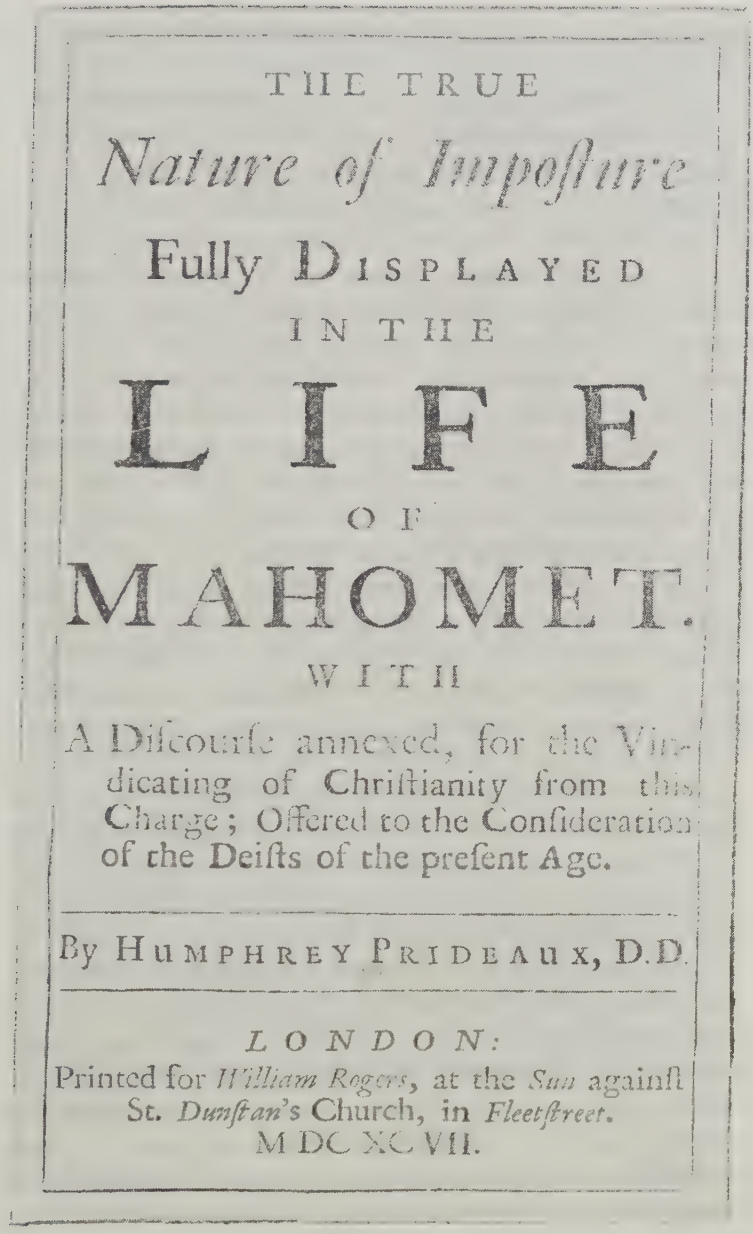
Cotton Mather, following Gee and Brooks, helped frame New Englanders' understanding of Barbary captivity with regular comments on the pirates. In his history *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Mather noted that in response to the provoking sins of New England, "God hath given up several of our sons into the hands of the fierce monsters of Africa. Mahometan Turks, and Moors, and devils, are at this day oppressing many of our sons with a slavery, wherein they 'wish for death, and cannot find it.'"[15] Mather's two most significant works on Barbary captivity were *A Pastoral Letter to the English Captives in Africa* (1698) and *The Goodness of God* (1703). As was Mather's wont, he penned *A Pastoral Letter* as if he meant the captives themselves to read it, but the letter was actually meant for readers in New England itself. In it, he promoted Christianity as a superior religion to Islam, and warned the captives to stand faithfully against the "Mahometan Tempters." Mather demonstrated some knowledge of the Qur'an by citing an English translation to prove that if Muslims read their holy book correctly, they would see that it pointed to Christ as the true Messiah. He cautioned prisoners to realize that their captivity in Africa was temporary, but captivity to sin was much worse and only gave a foretaste of the eternal torment to come in hell. It was the Lord who gave the captives over to the "African Pyrates" as a judgment against their sins. Instead of giving in to the temptations of the captors, it was much better to contemplate one's own sin, hold tight to Christ, and wait for redemption.[16]

By 1703, New Englanders had received news of the redemption of several hundred English prisoners, and in response Boston held a day of public thanksgiving for which Mather wrote *The Goodness of God.* A number of the captives, "delivered. . .from the most horrible Captivity in the world," considered Boston their home port and attended the service in which Mather preached. To describe the horrific nature of their captivity, Mather included a brief by William and Mary (found also in Brooks) promoting their redemption. While noting the usual deprivations, the account ended with perhaps the most fundamentally disturbing element of the Anglo-Americans' captivity:

the enslavement of whites by black masters. The captives were "sometimes driven about by Black-a-moors, who are set over them as Task-masters; and some of them have been so severely Whipp'd, that they have dropp'd down Dead." Incongruities such as this could not help but destabilize the appearance of racial permanency in Anglo-American slave-owning. The Virginia House of Burgesses went so far as to make this scenario illegal by stipulating that no "Negros, Mulattos, or Indians, although Christians, or Jews, Moors, Mahometans, or other Infidels" could own white Christians as slaves.[17]

Mather noted that while "now and then a wretched Christian. . .Renounced Christianity and Embraced Mahometanism," none of the New England captives had done so. God's grace did not allow them to "stretch out their Hands unto the Impostor Mahomet, and his accursed Alcoran!" Mather recounted Brooks's story of the Frenchman who converted and the English martyr who would not as an example of the strong faith of the sufferers. He rejoiced that now the slaves had been redeemed and were back among loved ones in New England. What had secured their liberty? Mather insisted it was the prayers of the New England churches: "with all due Humility; This Deliverance never began thoroughly to operate, until God began to awaken a Spirit of Prayer in the Churches of poor NEW-ENGLAND for it." Because of their faithfulness, "thou, O Mully Ishmael, with all thy Diabolical Fury, art no longer able to with-hold from us, the Friends, about whom God gave thee an Efficacious Order, To let them go." Mather closed with a warning to the liberated captives to make much of their lives now that they were saved from the "Filthy Disciples of Mahomet."[18]

The Barbary pirates' activities declined during the middle decades of the eighteenth century, but Anglo-Americans' use of Islamic categories and images had become a staple of religious polemics. American pastors and academics borrowed from a burgeoning European literature on Islam. The most notable and influential treatment of Islam which Anglo-Americans read was Humphrey Prideaux's biography *The True Nature of Imposture Displayed in the Life of Mahomet* (see Figure 1-1). This book was published in London in 1697 and went through eight editions there by 1723. Many learned colonists either read or heard about *The True Nature of Imposture*, because in the colonies the habit of applying the epithet "impostor" to "Mahomet" became nearly ubiquitous (though this usage was not unknown before Prideaux). American editions appeared in Philadelphia in 1796 and Fairhaven, Vermont in 1798, times of resumed troubles with North African piracy and worries about the powers of the new United States government. Prideaux was Dean of Norwich Cathedral and an orthodox Anglican theologian whose writings often confronted the threat of Deism. In *The True*



THE TRUE

Nature of Impoſture

Fully DISPLAYED

IN THE

LIFE

OF

MAHOMET.

WITH

A Diſcourſe annexed, for the Vindicating of Chriſtianity from this Charge; Offered to the Conſideration of the Deiſts of the preſent Age.

By HUMPHREY PRIDEAUX, D.D.

LONDON:

Printed for *William Rogers*, at the *Sun* againſt St. *Dunſtan's* Church, in *Fleetſtreet*.

MDCXCVII.

FIGURE 1-1. Title page, Humphrey Prideaux's *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Displayed in the Life of Mahomet* (London, 1697). Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Nature of Imposture he used Muhammad as a case study in religious fakery, as opposed to the authentic miracles of Christianity. Although Prideaux's book was derivative and full of errors, it shaped many American colonists' impressions of Islam's origins.[19]

Prideaux lamented how many Deists had charged Christianity with imposture, and he meant to hold up Islam as an actual fraud against which Christianity's legitimacy would become more apparent. Knowing that some might accuse him of painting Muhammad in the "foulest Colours," he insisted that he would approach Muhammad judiciously. Prideaux saw Islam as the judgment of God on the eastern churches that had been rife with bickering before the Prophet arose. Because the Christian churches turned their "Holy Religion into a Firebrand of Hell for Contention, Strife and Violence," God gave them over to the Muslims. He "turned their Churches into Mosques, and. . .forced on them that abominable Imposture of Mahometanism."[20] The rise of Islam, in Prideaux's formulation, was a cautionary tale against the disturbers of the church's peace.

As for the Prophet Muhammad himself, Prideaux argued that he hatched the scheme of Islam as a way to gain power over Arabia, and designed the new religion as a "Medley made up of Judaism, the several Heresies of the Christians then in the East, and the old Pagan Rites of the Arabs, with an Indulgence to all Sensual Delights." To authenticate his revelations, Muhammad soon began claiming visitations by the angel Gabriel. Prideaux noted that Muhammad began touting his prophetic authority at approximately the same time the Bishop of Rome asserted pastoral supremacy over the church. He thought the two developments not coincidental: "Antichrist seems at this time to have set both his Feet upon Christendom together, the one in the East, the other in the West."[21]

This association of the Roman church and Islam with Antichrist was common in the colonial period and the nineteenth century. Figures as various as Puritan lay leader Anne Hutchinson, the judge Samuel Sewall, and pastors Increase and Cotton Mather and Edward Taylor all commented on the connection, and New York's Lutheran leader Eric Tobias Bjorck noted that "the Scripture speaketh of Two great Anti-christs, one in the West, the other in the East. . .; one is called Mahomet, or Gog and Magog,. . .the other is the Pope." Prideaux also attributed much of Muhammad's successes to the promises of heaven's pleasure that he made to his followers, "which he cunningly framed to the gust of the Arabians." Because they lived in the "Torrid Zone," and because of the "excessive corruption of their Manners," his devotees responded eagerly to promises of cool drinks, shady glens, and abundant virgins.[22]

In the *Discourse for the Vindicating of Christianity*, Prideaux set out the fundamental characteristics of a fraudulent religion that set Islam apart from Christianity. An impostor religion would always (1) serve some "carnal Interest," (2) be led by wicked men, (3) have "Falsities" at the very heart of the religion, (4) use "craft and fraud" to accomplish its ends, (5) be backed by conspirators who would eventually be revealed, and (6) be spread by force.[23] Eighteenth-century Anglo-Americans widely attributed all these characteristics to Islam.

Prideaux's treatment of Muhammad was likely the most influential in eighteenth-century Anglo-America. The Library Company of Philadelphia had acquired a copy of *The True Nature of Imposture* by 1746, the New York Society Library owned one by 1758, and even the Wethersfield, Connecticut library listed a copy in a 1784 catalogue. Following Prideaux, anti-evangelical pastor John Caldwell once wondered "Is there any now hearing me but will own Mahomet was an Impostor?" He compared Muhammad's supposed deceptions to those committed by evangelicals in the Great Awakening of the 1740s. Both movements substituted overheated zeal for true piety, according to Caldwell. Thomas Wells Bray, pastor at Guilford, Connecticut, cited Prideaux in his *A Dissertation on the Sixth Vial* (1780) as an authority on the rapid expansion of Islam during Muhammad's life, explaining that "By cruel tyranny and over-bearing power, did that vile impostor Mahomet set up and propagate a false religion, which has been one of the greatest plagues to the christian religion, and filled all the eastern world with error and thick darkness, like the smoke of a bottomless pit." Charles Leslie's *A Short and Easie Method with the Deists* (originally published in London in 1698, with American editions in 1719 and 1783) used Prideaux to help show that Christianity was "incompatible with any imposture," saying that even learned Muslims knew that Muhammad's miracles were illegitimate.[24]

Anglo-Americans of various religious camps agreed with Prideaux and Leslie that the main flaws of both Islam and Roman Catholicism were irrationality and superstition. New Jersey's evangelical Presbyterian Jonathan Dickinson argued for "the reasonableness of Christianity" by contrasting it with Islam. "No wise man can trust in such a rhapsody of nonsense and confusion" as Islam, "and in such a medly of inconsistent, and absurd doctrines of religion and tyranny," with no proof other than the word of Muhammad. Dickinson noted that Islam offered no forgiveness of sins, and only promised sensual pleasures in heaven, which was "most disagreeable to a vertuous and rational mind."[25]

After Prideaux's, the next most important biography of Muhammad in Anglo-America appears to have been Henri de Boulainvilliers's *The Life of*

Mahomet, which was first translated into an English edition in London in 1731. It offered a more positive approach to Muhammad than Prideaux's. Boulainvilliers was a minor figure in the French Enlightenment, although he wrote some of the best French historical works in the age of Louis XIV. Boulainvilliers's Muhammad was much more enlightened than Prideaux's, and *The Life of Mahomet* was mostly written to counter Prideaux's view of Muhammad as impostor. Boulainvilliers argued that Muhammad no doubt misunderstood the nature of true Christianity, but he founded Islam as a reaction against truly un-Christian traits of the church, such as corruption and priestcraft, the same qualities that plagued the Roman Catholic church in the early eighteenth century. The Prophet was actually used by God to judge and purify the church. "Instead of chusing the Christian religion," he lamented, "Mahomet was so violently turned against it, by the abuses in its practice which he himself had seen, that he was rather excited to attack it, than to reform that which every true Christian bore with pain and sorrow." Boulainvilliers used Muhammad to shame Christians, whom he painted as partially responsible for the coming of Islam because of the deficiencies of the church. The success of Boulainvilliers's biography reminds us that British and European views of Islam were not homogenous or entirely negative during the eighteenth century.[26] However, Boulainvilliers's approach to Muhammad served polemical purposes within the French Enlightenment, as he appropriated Islam to promote anti-clericalism.

The Life of Mahomet was held in several colonial libraries, though it seems never to have come out in an American edition. It appeared in the Library Company of Philadelphia's catalogue in 1741, and in a 1772 accounting of the library of Robert Carter of Virginia. Tracing the exact reading habits of Anglo-Americans about Islam or Muhammad is perhaps not as important as realizing that they trafficked in an intellectual milieu ready to make use of Islamic categories. No matter how "knowledgeable" an author, his knowledge about Islam was located more in "internal apologetic concerns" than it was in the Islamic world.[27] Associating an opponent with Islam became a standard rhetorical move in religious debates, as it legitimized the accuser as a defender of righteousness.

A good early example of Americans' own uses of Islam was Rhode Island Baptist leader Roger Williams's attacks on George Fox in *G. Fox Digg'd out of His Burrowes* (1676). Throughout, Williams contrasted the Roman church, Islam, and Quakerism, all deceitful human systems, with the true religion of Christ. Williams hoped that "Old and New England may flourish when the Pope and Mahomet, Rome and Constantinople are in their Ashes," and that some of his Protestant readers might live to see "the Pope and Mahomet. . .

flung into the Lake that burns with Fire and Brimstone." Fox had argued that Quakerism proved its credibility by its quick growth and thousands of followers, but Williams noted that the same successes had marked Islam and Roman Catholicism. Williams reminded his readers of "the innumerable multitudes that followed after that stupendious Cheater Mahomet, even thirteen parts of the world, divided into thirty." He thought it remarkable that more people did not follow Fox, "this new Mahomet" of Quakerism since their religion was "so easie. . ., pretending so much from the Dove from Heaven as Mahomet did." Williams believed that both religions claimed a false inspiration from the Holy Spirit, and recalled the story that Muhammad trained birds to pick peas out of his ear to make it appear as though the Holy Spirit was speaking to him (a story which Prideaux rejected as apocryphal).[28]

As Williams's book indicated, English Protestants in America often included the destruction of Islam in their eschatological timetable, usually making it simultaneous with the future ruin of the Roman church. This belief was part of a "Judeo-centric" millennialism that was common, though not dominant, in seventeenth-century English Puritan thought. In this system, the mass conversion of the Jews would follow the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, and Islam generally. Increase and Cotton Mather, both of whom referenced Islam regularly, reflected on this prospect. Cotton Mather, excited in 1690 by the eschatological significance of William and Mary's "Glorious Revolution," predicted that the great victory for English Protestantism might also signal the coming destruction of Rome and the "Turkish Power," which he thought might soon become unable to wage war against the European states.[29] Similarly, Nicholas Noyes of Salem, Massachusetts, gave Islam a prominent place in the events of the last days in his election sermon *New-England's Duty and Interest.* He argued that the countries that had been Christian but had become "the Kingdoms of Antichrist & of Mahomet" would once again be won over to Christ in the last days. He took the resurrection of the witnesses discussed in Revelation 11 to mean that these nations would be liberated both from the Roman church and from "the Imposture and Oppression of the Mahometans." Despite the "fury and cruelty of the Arabian and Saracen or Mahometan Harpyes," Christ would rule the "East Empire" again some day. Likewise, the Harvard Hebrew instructor and Jewish Christian Judah Monis predicted that many Muslim countries would join with "King Gog" at Armageddon, and that Christ would there destroy them "with Pestilence and with Blood,. . . Hailstones, Fire, and Brimstone."[30]

It was not only New Englanders, more disposed than most to eschatological speculation, who held these opinions about Islam in the last days. Pres-

byterian pastor George Gillespie of Christiana Creek, Delaware, a future opponent of the Great Awakening, argued that the destruction of "Anti-Christ and Mahomet" would precede the Jews' conversion to Christianity. He interpreted the pouring out of the sixth vial of judgment, the drying up of the Euphrates River in Revelation 16:12, to mean the destruction of the Islamic powers, specifically the Ottoman Empire. "The Mahometan Turk is as powerful as ever; but when his power is broken, then there shall be the Conversion of the Jews." Gillespie further asserted that Christianity was superior to the "Mahometan Religion" because of the latter's focus on sensual pleasures in heaven. Presbyterian Samuel Davies of Virginia had an expansive view of the eschatological spread of the gospel, as it "shall triumph over heathenism, Mahometism, Judaism, popery, and all those dangerous errors that have infected the Christian church."[31]

Jonathan Edwards's son-in-law Aaron Burr also developed a speculative eschatology with a special place for Islam. Burr's theology was much more pessimistic than Edwards's, holding that the millennium would come not as a progressive triumph but through divine deliverance in times of future darkness. Burr saw Islam as one of the key persecutors of the true church, and followed Prideaux in arguing that it grew largely because of the corruptions of the eastern churches. The "Rise of that false Prophet and great Impostor Mahomet" came in the dark night of the church. Wherever it spread, "it seemed as if the bottomless Pit had been opened, and Satan at the Head of the Powers of Darkness, come forth." Reflecting Edwards's and others' interpretation of prophecy, Burr thought that Islam's appearance fulfilled the mysterious image of smoke locusts coming from the abyss in Revelation 9:2–3, because everywhere the religion went it spread "Misery and Woe, stupid Ignorance and Superstition." Considering the future, he noted that the Ottoman Empire still ruled much of Asia, Europe, and Africa, and that the Muslims were for the time being "the greatest Obstacle in the Way of spreading the Gospel." Burr thought that only a dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit, at which recent awakenings might have hinted, would remove the Muslim hindrance. Then the preaching of the gospel would be attended with such "Light & Glory, as that the Remainder of Pagan, Popish, & Mahometan Darkness, will flee before it."[32] Whether by conversion or destruction, many colonists agreed that Islam would be swallowed up by Christ's kingdom in the last days.

Anglo-American colonists also assumed, as had Prideaux, that whatever successes Islam had enjoyed only came by the sword. Thomas Paine of Weymouth, Massachusetts, contrasted the plain truth of Christianity with the imposed falsehoods of Islam: followers of "Mahomet perswade. . .by mas-

terly Evidence and Demonstration hurled about at the deadly Point of their victorious Swords, and most powerful Light and Energy, thundred forth by the mouth of their dreadful Engines of Cruelty and War." False religions like Catholicism and Islam, according to Paine, depended on bogus miracles and the threat of violence to keep believers in line. True Christianity, by contrast, demonstrated its truth by gentle persuasion and clear evidence. The Baptist leader John Walton similarly argued that Islam "was propagated by Force and Arms, and was partly borrowed out of the Christian Bible, and partly hatched out of the enthusiastical Brain of Mahomet." Islam succeeded through promises of sensual delights in heaven, including the assurances that "they should carnally enjoy beautiful Women in Heaven. This, together with many other ridiculous Notions, makes me prefer the Bible before the Alcoran," Walton concluded.[33] Many American Protestants like these, encountering new knowledge of the Islamic world, rushed to make the case that Christianity was superior to Islam.

Many argued further that the key to the distinctiveness of Protestant theology over Islamic, Catholic, or Jewish theology lay in the doctrine of grace. True (Reformed) religion depended on God's gracious intervention for salvation, while false religions put their hope in good works to justify man. The anonymous tract *The Sad Estate of the Unconverted* maintained that unconverted men are "exceedingly inclined to seek Salvation by our own Works. And this is the Way of the Mahometans." They believed that God gave Muhammad the law, so that anyone who obeyed those regulations would be saved. "The Papists seek Salvation in a like Manner," the tract noted, as they added all kinds of superfluous requirements to the divine law. The same was true for the Jews. Authentic Christians knew better: it was God's grace alone that saved and empowered them to do good. New Jersey revivalist Gilbert Tennent argued that false religions, including the "Mahometan imposture," focused on self-glorification. "Thro' the whole Alcoran there is a deep silence, about supernatural Principles of Worship." He believed that the Qur'an primarily taught "the Consideration of eternal Pleasures, to be afterward enjoy'd, as the Reward of good Works, and eternal Pains to be endured as the Punishment of bad."[34] Thus, Tennent's antirevivalist opponents, whom he believed had embraced works-righteousness, were no better than Muslims.

The most celebrated revivalist of the Great Awakening, the Anglican itinerant George Whitefield, seized upon the comparison of Christ and Muhammad in one of his most controversial and ill-advised public comments, saying in 1740 that the popular and deceased Archbishop John Tillotson of England "knew no more about true Christianity than Mahomet." Here

was another typical use of Muhammad in Anglo-American discourse. Whitefield argued that "as to the method of our acceptance with God, and our justification by faith alone, [Tillotson] certainly was as ignorant thereof as Mahomet himself." The name "Mahomet" provided a rhetorical device with which adversaries could denounce one another. The association with Muhammad implied illegitimacy, infidelity, and likely damnation. In Whitefield's case, he realized later that he had overplayed his hand by using Muhammad to condemn Tillotson. These were "injudicious and too severe expressions," he admitted, as both in the colonies and in Britain he found that many who might have supported him now became his enemies because of his attack against the archbishop.[35]

But Whitefield's enemies used the accusation of similarity to Muhammad against him, too. Alexander Garden, the Anglican Commissary of Charleston, South Carolina, argued that Whitefield promoted rank enthusiasm, as had Muhammad. Whitefield and his defenders had claimed that his success and great following indicated the blessing of God on his ministry, but Garden thought this fallacious logic: "the same Effects, and in still greater Degrees, attended the Ministry of Mahomet." Popularity was not a reliable gauge for legitimacy. Enthusiasm bred heretical religions such as Islam. "Was not Mahometanism founded in Enthusiasm?" asked Garden. "And does not this run so strong in the Veins of that Religion, that all true Mussulmans [Muslims] firmly believe the greatest Ideots or Madmen are the greatest Saints?"[36] One can see in Whitefield and Garden's counter-accusations the multiple uses of Muhammad in early America: He could be portrayed as an example of a graceless legalist or a wild enthusiast, depending on the rhetorical need of the moment.

Some of Whitefield's opponents raised the prospect of imposture and used Prideaux's treatment of Muhammad as a way to criticize evangelical enthusiasts, too. In *The Wonderful Narrative*, an anonymous account of the French Prophets of London (a group of spirit-filled Protestants in the early eighteenth century), the author noted how many of the French zealots followed after their ecstasies as signs of God's presence. The Prophets, however, turned out (as, by implication, Whitefield would) to be "either Impostors, or under the Power of Delusion, or an overheated Imagination." One of the best historical examples of these deluded visionaries was Muhammad, and the author used Prideaux's account to show how "in the Course of a few Years, as ridiculous an Imposture as ever was invented, obtained in many Countries." The author also cited Meric Casaubon's *Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (originally published in London, 1654), which suggested that Muhammad may have had epilepsy, explaining his trances and visions.

This diagnosis seems to have had some currency in early America as a number of writers referred to Muhammad as "epileptick." *The Wonderful Narrative* asserted that Muhammad may have begun his imposture by means of a blameless affliction, but he used the disease as a device to achieve power. *The Wonderful Narrative* echoed Casaubon's warning that people should not too quickly "give Credit to such Fits and Revelations."[37]

Evangelicals could also use Islam for their own arguments, as demonstrated in the tract *The Conversion of a Mehometan*, published originally in London in 1757, and printed twice during the 1770s in New London, Connecticut. This tract contained a letter, ostensibly written by a Turk, "Gaifer," to his friend Aly-Ben-Hayton. Gaifer told how he came to England to learn more about Christianity, which he had first heard about from an English slave. The letter recorded the story of Gaifer's conversion to evangelical Christianity, but it is so formulaic and polemical that it seems almost certain that Gaifer was only a fictional vehicle for an evangelical attack. The target was not Islam primarily, however, but the established Church of England ministers. Gaifer acquired a Bible and realized from reading it that man could not be saved by good deeds, but only by the grace of Christ. He then discovered an evangelical church meeting where he was told that he must be born again to enter heaven. In light of these truths, Gaifer was dismayed to find that the established clergy "are, for the most part, the greatest strangers to the essence of the Gospel."[38]

As Gaifer wrestled with how he could be saved, he received a visit from an Anglican priest, who assured him that he need not be born again or receive the Holy Spirit. His melancholic state of spiritual wrestling, the minister assured him, was only a "religious distraction of mind, which we call enthusiasm, we have a great deal of this in England." But Gaifer would not listen to the established clergyman, and sought out the evangelical minister to help him find salvation. Finally, Gaifer realized that Christ could deliver him from his sins, and he was saved. He wrote the letter to his friend back in Turkey to plead with him to consider Christianity. Conversion "would soon wean you from your superstitious and fruitless pilgrimage to Mecca and Arafata in honor of a grand Impostor; and engage you to come and see the salvation of God."[39] Despite this assertion, the tract had little to do with evangelism to Muslims; instead, it used a supposed Muslim convert to attack the established clergy.

Like many other Anglo-American pastors, Jonathan Edwards gave a great deal of attention to non-Christian religions, including Islam. Edwards's thoughts on Islam were not unique but only more developed than most commentators'. Edwards's interest in Islam had primarily to do with

its place in eschatology, its inferiority to Christianity, and its role in the ongoing debates with Deists. He made Muslims prominent in his millennial theology, arguing that as the millennium approached they would be destroyed. In the "Notes on the Apocalypse," Edwards argued that Satan's earthly kingdom was made up of three parts: the false Christian kingdom (Roman Catholicism), the Islamic kingdom, which he called "the kingdom of the false prophet," and the heathen kingdom. Edwards did not think these three would join forces in an actual coalition in the last days, but he did believe they would be conquered nearly simultaneously, represented prophetically by the pouring out of the seventh vial of Revelation 16. "Then shall be their last overthrow; and with that overthrow, the millennium shall begin," he wrote.[40]

The major opponents of true Christianity would be defeated either through conversion or warfare, according to Edwards. In the late 1740s, Edwards began keeping a notebook that followed, among other items of eschatological interest, news of Islamic conversions. He delighted in the *Scots Magazine*'s 1751 report that "5344 persons, who were formerly pagans or Mahometans," were baptized into the Greek Orthodox Church. In 1748's *An Humble Attempt*, Edwards further anticipated "the Destruction of the Church of Rome, the entire Extirpation of all Infidelity, . . .the Conversion of all the Jews, and the full enlightning and Conversion of all Mahometan and Heathen Nations, thro' the whole Earth." Edwards, unlike some others, came to believe that these events were likely to happen soon, but that the millennium might begin around the year 2000.[41]

Edwards also used the comparison to Islam to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity as a religious system, countering the threat posed by other religions to Christianity's exclusive truth claims. In the "Miscellanies," Edwards contrasted the effects of Christianity's and Islam's propagation. Although he found that Islam did share in some truths of "natural religion," he thought the two religions were immensely different in their "goodness." Christianity brought a great increase of "light and knowledge," while Islam represented a change "from light to darkness" and a "propagation of ignorance," which only tended to "debase, debauch, and corrupt the minds of such as received it." Edwards argued that Islam only succeeded by playing to man's "luxurious and sensual disposition." In contrast to Christianity, which flourished in the intellectually advanced Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures, Islam grew "in a dark corner of the earth, Arabia; and the people among whom it first gained strength, who sent out armies to propagate it to the rest of the world, were an ignorant and barbarous sort of people." Christianity was propagated by reason; Islam by the sword.[42]

Like Prideaux, Edwards argued that Christianity was based on observ-

able facts (presumably including miracles), while Islam was based on "Mahomet's pretences to intercourse with heaven, and his success in rapine, murder, and violence." After the publication of Prideaux's biography, Deist skeptics such as Matthew Tindal, Thomas Chubb, and John Toland had continued to agitate against traditional Christianity, sometimes by comparing Islam favorably to it. Edwards agreed with Prideaux that Islam was demonstrably inferior to Christianity, and that in light of Islam, Christianity looked even more viable intellectually. Edwards argued that Islam's persistent success made its own case for the necessity of revealed (as opposed to natural) religion, and provided a "great demonstration of the extreme darkness, blindness, weakness, childishness, folly, and madness of mankind in matters of religion."[43] Again in Edwards we see a polemical interest in Islam as an apologetic tool for Christianity, especially against the Deists.

Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard* once wondered "is it worse to follow Mahomet than the Devil?" For most early American observers, no such question was necessary: to follow the one meant following the other. Before the period of the American and French Revolutions, Anglo-Americans typically used categories from Islam as rhetorical tools to discredit opponents, or as players in eschatological speculation. The Revolutionary era saw significant changes in the uses of Islam, however. In addition to using images of Islam for religious purposes, polemicists often used Islam and its states as the world's worst examples of tyranny and oppression, the very traits that the Revolutionaries meant to fight.[44]

Calvinist minister Nathanael Emmons revealed the subtleties of the transition to more political uses of Islam in his sermon *The Dignity of Man* (1787). Emmons lifted up the potential of man to enlighten the world through reason and the gospel, and gave the Revolution a key place in Christian teleology. Charting the progress of reason and the gospel briefly through human history, Emmons noted Luther's Reformation, Newton's scientific discoveries, and included "Franklin in the cabinet, and Washington in the field, [who] have given independence and peace to America." Emmons thought these were only part of a greater process, as the "kingdom of Antichrist is to be destroyed, the Mahomedans are to be subdued, the Jews are to be restored, . . .and the whole face of things in this world, is to be beautifully and gloriously changed." Here, the subjugation of the Muslims was only part of a reasonable millennial process. This reflected the borrowing of traditional eschatological categories for America's republican ends, what historian Henry May has called "secular millennialism."[45] The main difference from earlier American uses was that Islamic categories now often served primarily political principles.

Defenders of Revolutionary ideals pointed regularly to Muslim states as models of tyranny that crushed essential freedoms. John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon's highly influential *Cato's Letters* (1723) made much of the Islamic governments' prohibitions on the free press and free exchange of ideas. The Baptist leader John Leland argued against state establishments of religion by saying these were more fit for Islamic states, because "Mahomet called in the use of law and sword to convert people to his religion; but Jesus did not, does not."[46] In the 1788 Dudleian Lecture at Harvard, Timothy Hilliard described Muhammad as "arrayed in armor and blood" and a "fierce invader of the sacred rights of mankind." Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*, influential among many Revolutionary leaders in America, depicted the Turkish state as uniquely despotic. A number of Americans picked up on Montesquieu's formulation that all governments fell somewhere on the continuum between absolute despotism and absolute democracy. The Baptist leader Enos Hitchcock quoted "the great Montesquieu" at length in his *Oration in Commemoration of the Independence* in 1793, arguing that a "state, in which the will of an individual is most frequently a law, and decides on the life or death of the subject, is called a despotic state. Such is the Turkish empire."[47]

By the end of the American Revolution, the American Protestant themes of Muslims converting to Christianity, Islam's place in the last days, and the blending of theological and political opinion regarding Islam had all become well developed. Theologians made a clear place for Islam in their visions of the last days, characterized Muhammad as an impostor, and deplored Muslim polities as despotic. More so than in later periods, most knowledge of Islam in the colonial American period serviced intra-Protestant polemical needs. One important facet of American Christian engagement with Islam that had yet to fully develop, however, was the ideology behind missions to Muslims. Many Americans already entertained hope that in the last days Muslims would convert to Christianity in large numbers. Joseph Bean noted excitedly in his diary in 1741 that he had heard in the news that a Muslim leader had "Resolved for to have the Bible translated into the Per[sian] to[ngue] for he himself was dissatisfied as to th[eir] turkish al[c]oran." Bean joyfully prayed that by these means the gospel might spread among Muslims, and he looked forward to the time when Christ would receive "the heathen for his Inheritance."[48] It remained for American Christians to begin sending missionaries to Muslims to try to fulfill that eschatological hope.